

18 July 1978

THE ETHICS OF GOVERNMENT SECRECY

Panel Discussion

Thursday evening, 27 July

Miscellaneous Points

- Ideally, no secrecy in a democracy
 - Government by the people infers awareness/knowledge
 - Secrecy antithetical to idea of participatory government.
- But idealism must always be tempered with realism
 - Not a compromise - just an acceptance of life as it is not as we wish it were
 - Individuals can sometimes delude themselves with idea that life does not have to be accepted, but
 - Government is forced to be realistic, i.e., distinguish between what is
 - what should be
 - what is possible
 - In society where most nations are closed/secretive, some secrecy on part of U.S. Government is vital to survival.
- Therefore secrecy - some amount, at some times - is ethical because it is in the interests of society
 - Infers that too much secrecy can be unethical - probably true
 - Too much secrecy can breed/cloak dishonesty, immorality, actions not in best interest of society.

- Where balance? How to recognize?
 - Difficult - no one's judgment perfect
 - Steps to ensure judgment is as good as possible:
 1. Guidelines - lean toward openness. Test:
Is secret in long term good of society?
 2. Moral representatives/appointees - public
officials must be extended some public trust
 3. Responsible oversight.